

# **Connecting the Dots: Wildfire, Forest Health, and Sustainable Rural Economies**

**Notes from the Webposium Oroville Regional Discussion  
October 29<sup>th</sup>, 2009**

**Hosted by the Sierra Nevada Conservancy**

## ***OROVILLE***

***Attendees:*** Calli-Jane Burch, Butte County FSC  
Valerie Glass, Butte County FSC  
Alexis Vertoli, Butte County RCD  
Randy Cousineau, Tehama County RCD  
Rhonda Brown, Upper Ridge FSC  
Amber Leininger, Deer Creek Watershed Conservancy  
Frank Stewart, CA FSC and Quincy Library Group  
Jim Brobeck, Sierra Forest Legacy  
Mark Morgan, Butte College Fire Chief  
John Middlebrook, private landowner

***1. From the morning panel discussions, what resonated for you?*** The SNC did a good job with the presentation but missed having someone from a county Fire Safe Council (FSC) on a panel and having more FSC folks at the outreach location. It was good to hear from Randy Moore.

***2. What is your vision of success?*** There are two approaches to restoration in a forest with fire/fuels/forest health and structure problems.

- Restoring structure – trying to make the forest look like something from its past.
- Restoring process - Bringing back fire as a manageable process with low to moderate fire behavior that builds forest resilience and supports a healthy economy.

***3. What is our “starting point for action”?*** Other issues we are starting with are:

- Smoke management - If fire is ‘managed’ groups such as the Air Resources Board (ARB) need to also understand that some smoke is as natural as the fire. The ARB needs to support this work, not restrict it as much as it does now.
- Water users investments - Water drives the economy in California and these forests are where the water is coming from. Water money is not getting back to the forests for fuels treatments/maintenance. There should be a way to tie money from water to forest health since we cannot depend on timber receipts alone for this. There should be a way to compensate land owners who maintain their forest lands for clean watersheds and forest health. The Department of Water Resources and the Bureau of Reclamation need to be involved in this process.
- Climate change and carbon sequestration. - This may be a way to increase revenues to counties too. However, carbon sequestration payments are not a panacea and should not be looked at as the primary source of funding for private landowner. The cost and expertise to measure and produce a base map of carbon is prohibitive to many landowners.

*Inventory* There must be periodic measurement checks.

*Markets* - It is a risky market. What is the value and how does it fluctuate?

*Time frame* - Property owners must enter into a conservation easement or project agreement that has very long time frames.

*Liability* – Once you sell a carbon credit you are responsible for its well being. What happens if the property has a pest or fire event?

*Demographic issues* – 60% of private land is owned by non-industrial forest landowners and the majority of them are over 60 years in age. The younger generations may not want to deal with the regulations and hassles of these easements/agreements so they convert the land other uses.

**4. What are the barriers or hurdles to overcome?**

- Educating the public - A lot of rural folks, especially newcomers from urban areas, aren't getting the message on defensible space. There is a need to connect long time rural residents with the newcomers to discuss what it is like to live in forest communities. Educators and children should be involved to help spread the word through person to person contact and advertising using 30 second commercials. We need to bring kids out into the forests and they will in turn bring their parents out. But, money is needed for buses, tours, Project Learning Tree folks and insurance.
- Funding - Most fire safe councils are independent of their county government and don't receive any tax funds. Lots of fuels treatment projects can't get funded. The continuous hunt for grant money is not sustainable – it takes too much time away from the 'real' work of good programs. SNC should package funds through the FSC clearinghouse for distribution to the local FSCs. FSC's need admin and staff funding help, as well as project operations; also funding for travel to meetings on regional efforts. Can't rely only on grants for projects; need continuous funding source.
- Maintenance: There needs to be a maintenance schedule for fuels breaks.

**5. What level of planning needs to go into these goal/activities?** CalFire, Sierra Nevada Conservancy, the Bureau of Land Management, the Regional forester, and fire safe councils should all be working together on these issues. The Department of Water Resources and the Bureau of Reclamation should be involved to help good landowners be reimbursed for maintaining healthy watersheds.

**6. What projects are going on currently or in the past? What are the reasons for success or failure of a biomass facility nearby? What is the potential for establishment of a new local biomass or wood products facility?** More biomass is being utilized in this area of California than anywhere else in the US. But we still need to create more opportunities to utilize substandard woody materials and the sources of this material need to be protected and made available. Issues include:

- Production costs - The economic disparity between biomass versus large scale power generators needs to be addressed. Biomass energy producers cannot get enough money to cover their costs. Biomass doesn't get the same price supports as solar and wind.
- Portable systems - We need to fund portable biomass equipment that could be mobilized quickly and sent into burned areas.
- Pellet plants – Create entrepreneurial opportunities like a pellet plant.
- Pine needles - Also, we need equipment that utilizes pine needles!

**7. Who here today can contribute to developing local collaboration?**

**8. Who is missing from today's discussion?**

- Small business owners— Solutions to these issues need to be driven and supported economically. Folks from small businesses would help to diversify participation.
- Young economically disadvantaged people - Twenty to 40 year olds who stay in economically depressed rural areas no matter what happens. They need jobs through an economic stimulus for small scale manufacturing using forest products.
- Insurance companies – They are a huge force. Homeowner policies are being cancelled because of proximity to federal lands that are not treated and/or rates are going way up.
- Chico State – They host a sustainability conference every year and those professors and students should be involved.

**9. What are the next steps?**

- Form an advisory committee - There could be a citizen's advisory committee to continue the work started today?
- Better coordinate fire plans - Fire Safe Councils and counties have differing fire plans. There needs to be better coordination of fire plans that show border to border work of fuels treatments by FS, BLM, timber producers, and private landowners. These maps should show completed work, treatments in progress and future treatment areas and they need to be easily accessible to anyone who wants them.

The US Forest Service should:

- Stewardship contracts - Provide for 10 year stewardship contracts that can provide materials to small cottage industries.
- Pilot projects - Support pilot projects like Quincy Library Group and Plumas Slapjack Project that deal with multiple issues - watersheds, forest health, and shaded fuel breaks.
- Carbon issues - The FS needs to address and take the lead on issues such as climate change and carbon sequestration.

***Are there resources that this community needs that the SNC or partners can provide? SNC could:***

- Get involved locally - Reps could go and visit each FSC, be an active participant at the county level. SNC could play a critical role as a funding source for those Fire Safe Council groups who need funds for employees and for producing county fire plans. Check out the Clean Technology Innovation Center in Oroville.
- Fund stewardship - SNC could establish a fund to assist FSCs in putting together stewardship contracts and NEPA compliance— but this would not be a grant!
- Work with the USFS - SNC should work with the regional forester in supporting the National Fire Plan that is up for reauthorization.
- Fund pilot projects - SNC could provide funding for USFS pilot projects.
- Support the formation of a cooperative or economic council that pools craftsmen and artists together to help support and market these cottage industries.

- Host a demonstration day at a co-generation facility. They should target FSC folks and local government folks, as well as having media out to capture the event.
- Host a seminar on stewardship contracts with help from local RCDs and FSCs.
- Provide a 'blanket insurance' policy for liability that a school group could 'borrow/temporarily use' for educational outings. Is that feasible?
- Fund eco tourism grants.
- Be a facilitator for these issues. This was a good effort at presenting this multifaceted issue. Let's do this again and broaden the participation.

***Miscellaneous Issues:***

- Rural development -Recreation is the key to expanding economic opportunities in rural areas. Rafting, rock climbing, canopy tours. There are so many possibilities but there is little interaction between rural communities. SNC could fund ecotourism grants.